

MEXICO

Reading Essentials and Study Guide 1

Mexico's Land and Economy

Key Terms

land bridge narrow strip of land that joins two larger land masses

peninsula piece of land with water on three sides

latitude location north or south of the Equator

altitude height above sea level

hurricane strong tropical storm with high winds and heavy rains

vaquero cowhand

maquiladora factory that puts together parts made in other countries

subsistence farm small farm where a farmer grows only enough food to feed his family

plantation large farm that raises a single crop for sale

industrialize when a country changes its economy to be based more on manufacturing and less on farming

service industry businesses that provide services to people rather than produce goods

Drawing From Experience

Have you seen commercials on television for vacations on beautiful sandy beaches? If you live where winters are cold, you probably have. Some of these commercials likely advertise beaches in Mexico.

This section describes the land, climate, and economic regions of our neighbor to the south.

Organizing Your Thoughts

Use the diagram on the next page to help you take notes. Mexico has three altitude zones. In the ovals, give the Spanish name for each zone. In the middle boxes, write what the name means in English. In the boxes on the right, give the zone's height: high, middle, or low.

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Mexico's Altitude Zones

Spanish Name	English Meaning	Height: High, Middle, or Low
1. <input type="text"/>	2. <input type="text"/>	3. <input type="text"/>
4. <input type="text"/>	5. <input type="text"/>	6. <input type="text"/>
7. <input type="text"/>	8. <input type="text"/>	9. <input type="text"/>

Read to Learn

Introduction

Mexico has many volcanoes because it sits on three plates in the earth's crust. Sometimes the plates hit together. This may cause an earthquake or hot melted rock to flow from a volcano. For this reason, Native Americans once called Mexico "the land of the shaking earth."

10. Why did Native Americans call Mexico "the land of the shaking earth"?

Bridging Two Continents

Mexico is a **land bridge**, or narrow strip of land that joins two larger land areas. Mexico connects North and South America. Geographers who study landforms think of Mexico as part of North America. Geographers who study culture think of Mexico as part of Latin America. Both are correct. Mexico's location and Spanish culture make it a bridge between two continents.

The Pacific Ocean borders western Mexico. Baja California runs along Mexico's west coast. It is a **peninsula**, or piece of land with water on three sides. The east side of Mexico borders the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. The Yucatán Peninsula reaches out between the Gulf and the Caribbean.

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Mexico is a rugged land. The country has three mountain ranges that make up the Sierra Madre, or “mother range.” Few people live in the Sierra Madre. The land is rough and not good for farming. The mountains hold copper, zinc, silver, and timber.

Mexico has many volcanoes. Popocatepetl, or “El Popo,” erupted in 2000. Thousands of people live close to this mountain. Mexicans must also live with the danger of earthquakes. In 1985 a quake killed almost 10,000 people in Mexico City, the capital.

The flat center of the country is the Plateau of Mexico. The Sierra Madre surround it. Mexico’s main cities lie in the valleys of this plateau.

Between the mountains and the sea are Mexico’s low plains. The northern part of the Pacific coast is a hot desert. It is mostly empty. Farther south the plain gets more rain. People farm this land. On the east side of the country, the Gulf Coastal Plain has richer soil and more rain. Many people farm here.

11. What two bodies of water border Mexico’s east coast?

Land of Many Climates

Latitude is the location north or south of the Equator. The Tropic of Cancer marks the northern edge of the Tropics. It runs through the center of Mexico. Areas south of this line are warm all year. Areas north of this line are warm in summer and cooler in winter.

Altitude is the height above sea level. It affects temperature as well. The higher you go, the cooler the temperatures—even in the Tropics.

Mexico has three altitude zones. The low areas on the coast have high temperatures. Mexicans call this zone the *tierra caliente*, or “hot land.” The next higher zone is the *tierra templada*, or “temperate land.” The climate is milder here. The highest zone is the *tierra fría*, or “cold land.”

Baja California and northern Mexico get little rain. Other regions receive more, mostly in summer and early fall. June to October is hurricane season in Mexico. **Hurricanes** are strong tropical storms with high winds and heavy rains. They form over the warm waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

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12. What are two things that affect temperature?

Mexico's Economic Regions

Mexico has three economic regions: the North, Central Mexico, and the South. Much of the North is dry and rocky. To farm it, people build canals to carry water to their fields.

The cowhands of northern Mexico are called **vaqueros**. They herd, rope, and brand cattle, even today.

Northern Mexico has a good economy. Monterrey makes most of Mexico's steel and cement. There and in cities such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, companies from the United States and elsewhere have built **maquiladoras**. These are factories that put together parts made in other countries. People worry that these factories damage the environment. People are also concerned about the health and safety of the workers. Still, factory work has raised living standards in these northern cities.

The central region is home to more than half of Mexico's people. This region lies in the Tropics, but is not hot and humid. Its high elevation keeps temperatures mild and pleasant all year. Volcanoes created rich soil for farming here. Mexico City and Guadalajara lie in this central region. Mexico City is one of the world's largest cities.

The South is the poorest economic region. The mountains in the center have poor soil. **Subsistence farms** are common here. These are small farms that grow only enough food for farmers to feed their families. The low areas near the coasts have good soil and lots of rain. Here, rich farmers grow sugarcane and bananas on **plantations**. These are large farms that raise a single crop for sale.

Tourists love the beautiful beaches and warm temperatures on Mexico's coasts. They come from all over the world to Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta, and Cancún.

13. Why are people concerned about maquiladoras?

MEXICO**Reading Essentials and Study Guide 1 (continued)****Mexico's Economy Today**

Mexico's economy ranks in the top 15 in the world. Farming is important. Farmers grow mainly corn, beans, wheat, and rice for use in Mexico. They grow coffee, cotton, vegetables, fruits, and tobacco, and raise animals to sell to other countries. In recent years, Mexico has **industrialized**. It has changed its economy to depend less on farming and more on manufacturing. Factories in Mexico make cars and steel. They also make consumer goods, such as clothes.

Mexico has large amounts of oil and natural gas. These energy resources lie in the Gulf of Mexico and along Mexico's southern coast. Mexico also has many **service industries**. These are businesses that provide services to people rather than make goods.

In 1994 Mexico joined Canada and the United States in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Some Americans are afraid NAFTA will cause jobs to move from the United States to Mexico. Others say it is good for the United States if Mexico is successful.

14. Where does Mexico's economy rank in the world?
